

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A communications outlet, comprising:

5 a housing configured for placement in an operating area of a user;

10 user interface circuitry in the housing, the user interface circuitry being operative to provide an interface to user equipment located generally in the user operating area, the user equipment including a user telephone device and a user data device, the interface to the user equipment including a link-layer interface to the user data device;

15 premises interface circuitry in the housing, the premises interface circuitry being operative to provide an interface to premises equipment located generally outside the user operating area, the premises equipment including data processing equipment and telephone communications equipment providing access to a public telephone network; and

20 bridge circuitry in the housing, the bridge circuitry being operative to establish communications connections between the user interface circuitry and the premises interface circuitry.

25 2. A communications outlet according to claim 1, wherein the housing is attachable to a wall.

3. A communications outlet according to claim 2, wherein the housing is attachable to a wall in a permanent manner.

30 4. A communications outlet according to claim 3, wherein the housing is configured to be disposed in an opening of a wall and secured to the wall at the edges of the opening.

5. A communications outlet according to claim 4, further comprising connectors for connecting the premises interface circuitry to wiring within the wall in a splice fashion.
- 5 6. A communications outlet according to claim 2, wherein the housing is attachable to a wall in a removable manner.
- 10 7. A communications outlet according to claim 6, wherein the housing includes a plug for insertion into a modular telephone jack.
- 15 8. A communications outlet according to claim 1, wherein the interfaces to the user equipment and the premises equipment include wired and wireless connections.
- 20 9. A communications outlet according to claim 8, wherein at least one of the wired connections conforms to a carrier sense multiple access communications protocol.
- 25 10. A communications outlet according to claim 8, wherein at least one of the wireless connections conforms to a master-slave communications protocol.
11. A communications outlet according to claim 8, wherein the bridge circuitry is operative to automatically use one of the wireless connections to communicate with the premises equipment if the obtainable data rate is greater than the data rate that can be obtained by a wired connection to the premises equipment.
- 30 12. A communications outlet according to claim 1, wherein the premises interface circuitry includes an interface to a private branch exchange.

13. A communications outlet according to claim 1, wherein the user telephone interface is an analog telephone interface.

5 14. A communications outlet according to claim 1, wherein the user telephone interface is a digital telephone interface.

10 15. A communications outlet according to claim 1, further comprising a processor operative to provide high-level services to the user via the user data interface.

16. A communications outlet according to claim 15, wherein the high-level services include data encryption.

15 17. A communications outlet according to claim 15, wherein the high-level services include user authentication.

18. A communications outlet according to claim 15, wherein the high-level services include diagnostics and status reporting to the user.

20 19. A communications outlet according to claim 15, wherein the diagnostics are operative to detect problems with a connection to the user, and wherein the status reporting is operative to notify the user of the detected connection problems.

25 20. A communications outlet according to claim 1, further comprising power circuitry operative to receive DC power from one of the interfaces.